

MOLOKAI, THE LIVING TOMB OF NEARLY A THOUSAND LEPERS

Here Are the Unclean, Put Away
By Themselves Far From the
Busy Haunts of Men--

Well Cared For By the Generous People of
This Territory—Through a Chosen Speaker
They Make Known Their Complaints
to the Board of Health.

ON THE threshold of the twentieth century, when the light of science throws its far-reaching rays with such marvelous results upon the problems of the varied diseases to which flesh is heir, dispelling the shadows of ancient ignorance and prejudice, there yet remains unquenched the most horrible and revolting of all human ailments, rebuking the progress of the age.

In the valley of the shadow of death, on the island of Molokai, condemned to a lingering decay, are nearly a thousand souls, awaiting in silent suffering the inevitable end. Striking from each other and in horror of themselves, they wait, in who knows what mental anguish, beneath the shadow of the relentless, towering mountains which are their natural prison walls. Unclean, cast off from the fellowship of the world, who but the leper himself can appreciate the unspeakable loneliness to which he is condemned?

Through the courtesy of the Board of Health, I was afforded the rare opportunity of visiting the lepers at Molokai on the occasion of that body's last semi-annual trip to the Isle of the Doomed.

With the rising of the sun the little steamer James M. Keene, with the Board of Health party on board, dropped her anchor at a safe distance from the port of Kalaupapa, and a few hundred yards away the leper settlement, with its towering guard of abrupt mountain walls, lay before us in the glory of the tropic morning.

The Pacific's waves breaking and breaking against the rocky shores. There is no harbor off the Molokai settlement, and even vessels must stand aloof. In the distance people could be seen gathering along the shore, and as the steamer's boats, carrying the visitors, neared the landing, the strains of the leper band, pathetic in imperfection, came over the water in dismal semblance of greeting.

First the members of the Board of Health and their invited guests disembarked at the landing, and, following in another boat, came the little party of the relatives of aged or dying lepers, who had been permitted to pay a last visit to their

doomed loved ones. The number of these visitors was necessarily limited on account of the lack of accommodations of the steamer, and they had been selected with a view to giving those lepers nearest to death an opportunity of once again seeing their nearest of kin from the outer world.

The first impression of a visitor to Molokai is one that will linger with him all his life. As the boats were rowed up beside the landing the lepers crowded down the rocky embankment, peering into the faces of those from the outer world, the first they had beheld for half a year, and with horrified fascination their gaze was returned. It was a scene such as might have been pictured by Dante in the more dismal and hopeless infernos, where not active torment was the order of punishment, but where slow despair and awful gloom were hideously painted on human features and forms; it was a nightmare assembly of the lame the halt and the blind, and in each form of affliction there was a hideousness of detail that would cause the most sympathetic to turn away in revulsion. Arms were outstretched and waved in greeting, the hands of which were eaten away by the loathsome decay; the revolting deformities of tubercular leprosy with its distorting blisters, marred twisted faces beyond the semblance of human features, and bulging, inflamed and decaying eyes, most hideously sightless, were turned towards the visitors, while those so afflicted clung with decaying hands to some other leper whose vision remained unimpaired. To complete the picture of living horror, there arose the weird, heartrending wail of the stricken ones—a sound indescribably piteous and sorrowful, which, once heard, can never be forgotten.

This was the first time that the new regulation of the Board of Health prohibiting the personal greeting and mingling of the lepers and their visiting relatives, was to be enforced. Formerly no restrictions were placed on the lepers and their visitors in this regard; but the affectionate disposition of the Hawaiians led them into such indications of kissing and embracing as to greatly increase

the danger of contamination, and it was deemed necessary that some provision for keeping them apart should be made. Accordingly the double-fence stockade plan had been adopted. An enclosure of two fences, six feet apart, has been built within a few yards of the landing, on an elevation, and it was into this that the relatives of the lepers were marched, separated from the lepers by a line of armed guards. As this seemingly cruel, but necessary, provision was carried out and the little band of Hawaiian visitors was hurried forward into the stockade, there arose from the shore the sound of the lepers' wail, tremulous and sorrowful, and accompanied by the rocking and swaying of the bodies of the mourners.

As some of the afflicted recognized relatives they had not seen for years, and as their relatives, in turn, saw in the distorted features of those beyond the line lingering resemblances to father, mother, sister or brother, there were impetuous efforts on the part of both to break through the lines and rush into each other's arms. Rumors to the effect that the lepers would cause trouble and attempt to break down the fences followed the new rule be enforced reached the officers of the Board of Health, and a possible outbreak was counted upon. But as was consistent with the gentle nature of the Hawaiians, they made no trouble, and after the first impetuous resistance submitted quietly to the inevitable, seemingly realizing the futility of rebellion.

When the gates of the stockade closed behind the Hawaiian visitors the lepers made a rush to the outer fences, clinging to the pickets and endeavoring to reach forth their maimed hands to clasp hands extended through the inner fence six feet away, and heartrending cries of grief and sorrow followed.

The visitors remained on the island from 7 a. m. to 4 p. m., and a great many imperishable memories were crowded into those nine hours.

Leaving the little group of visitors to their pitiable situation, the members of the Board, who had much work to do, set out on horseback to travel over the settlement and investigate its needs.

Three miles from Kalaupapa, the first settlement, is the village of Kalawao, where the Bishop Home for Boys is ably managed by the Catholic missionaries. The Home for Girls is at Kalaupapa, in charge of the Catholic Sisters, whose lives of absolute unselfishness and devotion to comforting the sorrows of others are a wonderful and beautiful lesson to humanity. Both of these homes were visited, and the patient Sisters conducted the Board of Health party through the cottages with some pride, smiling reassuringly to the unfortunate girls and women who ran away or covered their faces with their hands at first. Some of the poor, hideous creatures were very sensitive and hid their faces from view when the visitors passed.

Too much praise cannot be given the Sisters for their admirable work, to which they are devoting their lives. The little cottages wherein the leper girls sleep are kept as neat and clean and made as attractive as possible. The Sisters have interested the stricken girls in fancy work, and many pretty little bits of needlework and handsome *bric-a-brac* ornament the rooms. The snowy linen of the little white coats in each dormitory were freshly trimmed with lace and some broderies made by the girls, and flowers and palms about the rooms bespoke the

summit that the Sisters have brought into the lives of the stricken ones. The cottages accommodate six girls each, and the girls are allowed to group themselves as they choose. In this way each cottage is in its way a home, where the girls can be with those who are most congenial to them. Some of the girls have taken up music, and one young Hawaiian woman of very comely appearance and no visible signs of leprosy entertained the visitors with several skillfully executed piano selections. The inmates of the Girls' Home range in age from womanhood to tiny infants, and one beautiful little girl with big brown eyes and pretty curls was dancing about the garden, merrily, on her temple there was a little, deadly discoloration of the skin. This was the only indication of the dread disease, but it was the doom of the little one, who, when called by the Sister, came laughingly to meet the visitors.

At the Boys' Home things are conducted in much the same way, under the management of the Brothers. A really creditable band has been organized. One of the most pathetic experiences of the day to the visitors was the playing of welcoming selections by this band at the noon hour.

The family homes and cottages were also visited, and the pretty residences, surrounded with flourishing flower gardens and shrubbery, told of consolation left to those whose doomed lives seemed shut out from hope.

Whatever can be done for the unfortunate inmates imprisoned within the circle of the towering mountain walls has been or is being done, and absolutely no criticism can be made of the work of the authorities in this matter. All of the lepers are supplied with advantages that people of the same class could never hope to have on the outside and aside from the horror of the dread disease and the sense of imprisonment, the situation is a happy one.

At 1 o'clock there was a mass meeting of the lepers in front of the Superintendent's home. Each time the Board of Health visits the settlement an opportunity is given the lepers to name their grievances, and it was for this purpose that the population, nearly a thousand in all, gathered in front of Mr. Reynolds' gate. The spokesman for the lepers was a half-white who was formerly a clerk in one of the local courts, and who is extremely bright and well educated. He voiced the complaints of the lepers, which were minor ones in themselves, and made a plea to the Board for a more regular supply of paia, from which their poi is made. It has been impossible to supply this paia regularly on account of the lack of taro, and some discontent has arisen among the lepers on account of a fancied abuse, which is most natural. The spokesman was mounted on a platform, and surrounding him were the people of the settlement, who regard him in a manner as a leader.

Such a scene cannot fail to haunt the memory of any who have ever seen it. A sea of hideous, distorted faces, some of them twisted into inhuman grins, some drawn and pained, others a mass of the horrible blisters of tubercular leprosy; hands from which fingers have been eaten away, waving in the air, and cries of "Hea!" "Hea!" coming from the stricken crowd as the speaker voiced some sentiment universally approved. The speaker himself, tall, lean and wasted, stood in the midst of the crowd, talking in a high-pitched, broken voice, and uttering the

grievances of the lepers in perfect and sweet English. His face was drawn, his eyes were nearly gone, and the decay about them partially concealed by large dark glasses. The muscles of his lower jaw were affected, and a most horrible expression was given his whole distorted face by the continual dropping of this jaw. While the man spoke the jaw hung, leaving a few discolored teeth visible, and as the quivering voice reached the end of a paragraph a maimed hand, from which three fingers were gone, was lifted to shove the dislocated jaw back into place. To dwell upon the horrors of this scene would be morbid.

At 4 o'clock the signal was given for the departure, and the Board of Health party arrived at the wharf just as the boat containing the lepers' visitors was being pushed off. The occupants of the boat were weeping and rocking their bodies back and forth in abandonment of grief. It was the last visit to Molokai that they would be permitted to make for many years, if at all. On the barren rocks of the shore, at the water's edge, their stricken relatives had assembled, waiting and mourning piteously.

The remaining boat for the Board of Health party was brought up to the landing, and we embarked, the crew of the Makae lifting their oars with a long, regular stroke as we glided out over the water and away from Molokai.

The last impression of Molokai was much the same as the first, except in addition there was an element of utter desolation—the wail of the lepers, standing among the barren rocks on the shore, with its import of inexpressible grief, sorrow and isolation—a thing never to be forgotten.

E. C.

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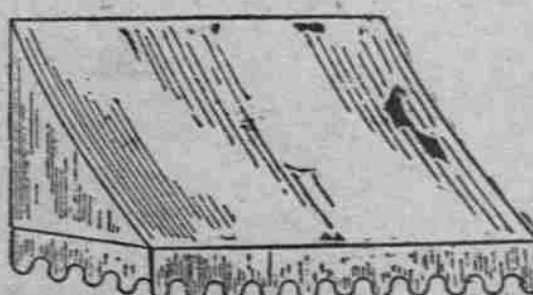
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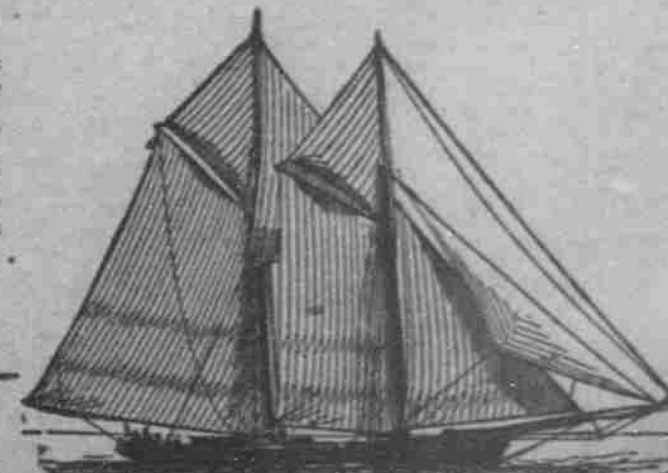
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